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They Know Christ who Keep his

141. d. commandments.

508.

Cudworth.









Leaven Leaves.

"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

GALATIANS v. 9.

They know Christ

WHO KEEP HIS

Commandments.

By RALPH CUDWORTH, D.D.



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MDCCCLVIII.

141. d. 508.

And hereby we do know, that we know
him, if we keep his commandments.
—He that saith I know him, and
keepeth not his commandments, is a
liar, and the truth is not in him.”—
1 JOHN ii. 3, 4.



THEY KNOW CHRIST
WHO
KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

WE have much inquiry concerning knowledge in these latter times. The sons of Adam are now as busy as ever Adam himself was about the tree of knowledge of good and evil; shaking its boughs, and scrambling for the fruit: whilst, I fear, many are too unmindful of the tree of life. And, though there be now no cherubim, with their flaming swords, to fright men off, yet the way that leads to it seems to be solitary and untrodden, as if there were but few that had any mind to taste of its fruit. There are many that speak of new glimpses and discoveries of truth, of dawnings of Gospel light. And no question but God has reserved much

of this for the very evening and sunset of the world; for, in the latter days, "knowledge shall be increased." But yet I wish we could, in the meantime, see that day dawn which the apostle speaks of, and that "day-star arise in men's hearts." I wish, whilst we talk of light and dispute about truth, that we could walk more as "children of the light." But, if St John's rule in the text be good, that no man truly knows Christ but he who keeps his commandments, it is much to be suspected that many of us who pretend to light, have a thick and gloomy darkness within overspreading our souls.

There are now many large volumes and discourses written concerning Christ; thousands of controversies discussed, infinite problems determined, concerning his divinity, humanity, union of both together, and what not. So that our bookish Christians, who have all their religion in writings and papers, think they are completely furnished with all kinds of knowledge concerning Christ. And, when they see all their leaves lying about them, they think they have a goodly stock of knowledge and truth, and cannot possibly miss the way to heaven; as if reli-

gion were nothing but a little bookcraft, a mere paper-skill.

But, if St John's rule here be good, we must not judge of our knowing Christ by our skill in books and papers, but by our keeping his commandments. And that, I fear, will discover many of us, notwithstanding all this light which we boast of round about us, to have nothing but Egyptian darkness within our hearts.

The vulgar sort think that they know Christ enough out of their creeds, and catechisms, and confessions of faith: and if they have but a little acquainted themselves with these, and, like parrots, have conned the words of them, they doubt not but that they are sufficiently instructed in all the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Many of the more learned, if they can but wrangle and dispute about Christ, imagine themselves to be grown great proficients in the school of Christ.

The greater part of the world, whether learned or unlearned, think that there is no need of purging and purifying their hearts for the right knowledge of Christ and his Gospel. But, though their lives be never so wicked, their hearts never so foul within,

yet they may know Christ sufficiently out of their treatises and discourses, out of their mere systems and bodies of divinity. Which I deny not to be useful in a subordinate way; although our Saviour prescribes to his disciples another method for coming to the right knowledge of divine truths: "He that will do my Father's will, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." The true Christian, indeed, is not he that is only book-taught, but he that is God-taught; he that has "an unction from the Holy One," "that teacheth him all things;" he that has the Spirit of Christ within him, that searcheth out the deep things of God: "For, as no man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man, which is in him; even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God."

Ink and paper can never make us Christians, can never beget a new nature, a living principle in us; can never form Christ, or any true notions of spiritual things, in our hearts. The Gospel, that new law which Christ delivered to the world, is not merely a dead letter without us, but a quickening spirit within us. Cold theorems and maxims, dry and jejune disputes, lean syllogis-

tical reasonings, could never yet, of themselves, beget the least glimpse of true heavenly light, the least sap of saving knowledge, in any heart. All this is but the groping of the poor dark spirit of man after truth; to find it out with his own endeavours, and feel it with his own cold and benumbed hands. Words and syllables, which are but dead things, cannot possibly convey the living notions of heavenly truths to us. The secret mysteries of a divine life, of a new nature, of Christ formed in our hearts, cannot be written or spoken, language and expressions cannot reach them: neither can they be ever truly understood, except the soul itself be kindled from within, and awakened into the life which animates them. A painter that would draw a rose, though he may flourish some likeness of it in figure and colour, can yet never paint the scent and fragrancy; or, if he would draw a flame, he cannot put a constant heat into his colours: he cannot make his pencil drop a sound, as the echo in the epigram mocks at him. All the skill of cunning artisans and mechanics cannot put a principle of life into a statue of their own making. Neither are we able to enclose in

words and letters the life, soul, and essence of any spiritual truths, and, as it were, to incorporate it in them.

Some philosophers have determined, that virtue cannot be taught by any certain rules or precepts. Men and books may propound some direction to us, that may engage us in a course of life and practice, by means of which we shall at last find virtue within ourselves, and be experimentally acquainted with it; but they cannot teach it us, like a mechanic art or trade. No, surely: "there is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding." But we shall not meet with this spirit anywhere but in the way of obedience: the knowledge of Christ, and the keeping of his commandments, must always go together, and be mutual causes of one another:

"Hereby we know, that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

I come now to these words themselves, which are so pregnant, that I shall not need to force out anything from them. I shall, therefore, only take notice of some few ob-

servations, which drop from them of their own accord, and then conclude with some application of them to ourselves.

1. First, then, if our keeping Christ's commandments be the right method of discovering our knowledge of Christ, then we may safely draw conclusions concerning our state and condition from the conformity of our lives to the will of our Redeemer.

Would we know whether we know Christ aright, let us consider whether the life of Christ be in us. He that has not the life of Christ in him, has nothing but the name, nothing but a fancy of Christ—he has not the substance of him. Whoso builds his house upon this foundation, not an airy notion of Christ swimming in his brain, but on Christ really dwelling and living in his heart, as our Saviour himself bears witness, he “buildeth his house upon a rock,” and when the floods come, and the winds blow, and the rain descends, and beats upon it, it shall stand impreguably. But he who builds all his comfort upon an ungrounded persuasion that God, from all eternity, has loved him, and absolutely decreed him to life and happiness, and seeks not for God really dwelling in his soul, he

builds his house upon a quicksand, and it shall suddenly sink, and be swallowed up; "his hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a spider's web; he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure."

We are nowhere commanded to pry into these secrets; but the wholesome counsel and advice given us is this—"to make our calling and election sure." We have no warrant in Scripture to peep into these hidden rolls and volumes of eternity, and to make it our first object, when we come to Christ, to spell out our names in the stars, and to persuade ourselves that we are certainly elected to everlasting happiness, before we see the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, shaped in our hearts. God's everlasting decree is too dazzling and bright an object for us to set our eye upon. It is far easier and safer for us to look upon the rays of his goodness and holiness, as they are reflected in our hearts, and there to read the mild and gentle characters of God's love to us in our love to him, and our hearty compliance with his heavenly will; as it is safer for us, if we would see the sun, to look upon it here be-

low in a pail of water, than to cast up our daring eyes upon the body of the sun itself, which is too radiant and scorching for us. The best assurance that any one can have of his interest in God is, doubtless, the conformity of his soul to God. Those divine purposes, whatsoever they may be, are altogether unsearchable and unknowable; they lie wrapped up in everlasting darkness, and covered in a deep abyfs. Who is able to fathom the bottom of them?

Let us not, therefore, make this our first attempt towards God and religion, to persuade ourselves strongly of these everlasting decrees. For if, at our first flight, we aim so high, we shall haply but scorch our wings, and be struck back with lightning, as those giants of old were that would needs attempt to assault heaven. And it is indeed a most gigantic essay, to thrust ourselves so boldly into the lap of heaven. It is a prank of Nimrod, of a mighty hunter, thus rudely to deal with God, and to force heaven and happiness before his face, whether he will or not. The way to obtain a good assurance indeed of our title to heaven is, not to clamber up to it by a ladder of our own ungrounded persuasions, but to dig as low as

hell, by humility and self-denial in our own hearts: and though this may seem to be the farthest way about, yet it is indeed the nearest and safest way to it. We must, as the Greek epigram speaks, ascend downward, and descend upward, if we would indeed come to heaven, or get any true persuasion of our title to it.

The most gallant and triumphant confidence of a Christian riseth safely and surely on this low foundation, that lies deep underground, and there stands firmly and steadfastly. When our heart is once turned into a conformity with the Word of God, when we feel our will perfectly to concur with his will, we shall then presently perceive a spirit of adoption within ourselves, teaching us to cry, Abba, Father! We shall not then care for peeping into those hidden records of eternity, to see whether our names be written there in golden characters; no—we shall find a copy of God's thoughts concerning us written in our own breasts. There we may read the characters of his favour to us; there we may feel an inward sense of his love to us, flowing out of our hearty and unfeigned love to him. And we shall be more undoubtedly persuaded of it,

than if any of those winged watchmen above, who are privy to heaven's secrets, should come and tell us that they saw our names enrolled in those volumes of eternity. But, on the contrary, though we strive to persuade ourselves ever so confidently, that God from all eternity hath loved us, and elected us to life and happiness, if yet, in the meantime, we entertain any iniquity within our hearts, and willingly close with any temptation,—do what we can, we shall find many a cold qualm, every now and then, seizing upon us at approaching dangers; and when death itself shall grimly look us in the face, we shall feel our hearts die within us, and our spirits quite faint away, though we strive to raise them and recover them, never so much, with the strong waters of our ungrounded presumptions. The least inward evil, willingly continued, will be like a worm, fretting the gourd of our jolly confidence and presumptuous persuasion of God's love, and always gnawing at the root of it; and though we strive to keep it alive, and continually besprinkle it with some dews of our own, yet it will be always dying and withering in our bosoms. But a good conscience within will

be always better to a Christian than "health to his navel, or marrow to his bones;" it will be an everlasting cordial to his heart; it will be softer to him than a bed of down, and he may sleep securely upon it, in the midst of raging and tempestuous seas, when the winds bluster, and the waves beat round about him. A good conscience is the best looking-glass of heaven, in which the soul may see God's thoughts and purposes concerning it reflected as so many shining stars: "Hereby we know Christ; hereby we know that Christ loves us, if we keep his commandments."

2. Secondly, if hereby only we know that we know Christ, by our keeping his commandments, then the knowledge of Christ does not consist merely in a few barren notions in a form of certain dry and sapless opinions.

Christ came not into the world to fill our heads with mere speculations, to kindle a fire of wrangling and contentious dispute among us, and to warm our spirits against one another with angry and peevish debates, whilst, in the meantime, our hearts remain all ice within towards God, and have not the least spark of true heavenly fire to melt

and thaw them. Christ came not to possess our brains with some cold opinions, that send down a freezing and benumbing influence upon our hearts. Christ was a master of life, not of the schools: and he is the best Christian whose heart beats with the purest pulse towards heaven; not he whose head spins out the finest cobwebs.

He that endeavours really to mortify his passions, and, in his life, to comply with that truth which his conscience is convinced of, is nearer a Christian, though he never heard of Christ, than he who believes all the vulgar articles of the Christian faith, and plainly denies Christ in his life.

Surely the way to heaven that Christ has taught us is plain and easy, if we have but honest hearts: we need not many criticisms, many school distinctions, to come to a right understanding of it. Surely Christ came not to ensnare us and entangle us, with captious niceties, or to puzzle our heads with deep speculations, or to lead us through hard and craggy notions into the kingdom of heaven. I persuade myself, that no man shall ever be kept out of heaven for not comprehending mysteries that were beyond

the reach of his shallow understanding, if he had but an honest and good heart, that was ready to comply with Christ's commandments. "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven?"—that is, with high speculations to bring down Christ from thence; or, "Who shall descend into the abyss beneath?"—that is, with deep-searching thoughts to fetch up Christ from thence: but lo! "the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart."

But I wish it were not the distemper of our times to scare and fright men with opinions, and make them solicitous only about entertaining this and that speculation, which will not render them anything the better in their lives, or the liker unto God; whilst, in the meantime, there is no such care taken about our keeping Christ's commandments, and being renewed in our minds, according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. We say, "Lo, here is Christ!" and "Lo, there is Christ!"—in these and those opinions; whereas, in truth, Christ is neither here, nor there, nor anywhere, but where the spirit of Christ, where the life of Christ is.

Do we not, now-a-days, open and lock

up heaven with the private key of this and that opinion of our own, according to our several fancies, as we please? And, if any one observe Christ's commandments never so sincerely, and serve God with faith and a pure conscience, yet, haply, understands not some contended-for opinions, some darling notions, he has not the right *shibboleth*, he has not the true watch-word, he must not pass the guards into heaven. Do we not make this and that opinion, this and that outward form, to be the wedding-garment, and boldly sentence to outer darkness those who are not invested with it? Whereas, every true Christian finds the least dram of hearty affection towards God to be more cordial and sovereign to his soul, than all the speculative notions and opinions in the world; and though he study, also, to inform his understanding aright, and free his mind from all error and misapprehensions, yet it is nothing but the life of Christ deeply rooted in his heart that is the chemical elixir which he feeds upon. Had he "all faith, that he could remove mountains," as St Paul speaks; had he "all knowledge, all tongues and languages"—yet he prizes one dram of love beyond them all. He ac-

counts him that feeds upon mere notions in religion to be but an airy and chameleon-like Christian. He now finds himself otherwise rooted and centred in God than formerly, when he merely contemplated and gazed upon him; he tastes and relishes God within himself; he has *quendam saporem Dei*—a certain flavour of God: whereas, before, he did but rove and guess after him at random. He feels himself safely anchored in God, and will not be dissuaded from enjoying God; though, perhaps, he skill not many of those subtleties which others make the *alpha* and *omega* of their religion. Neither is he scared by those childish affrightments with which some would force their private conceits upon him; he is above the superstitious dread of mere speculative opinions, as well as the superstitious reverence of mere outward ceremonies; he cares not so much for subtlety, as for soundness and health of mind. And, indeed, as it was well spoken by a noble philosopher, that, “without purity and virtue, God is nothing but an empty name”—so it is as true here, that, without obedience to Christ’s commandments, without the life of Christ dwelling in us, whatsoever *opinion* we may enter-

tain of him, Christ is only named by us, he is not known.

I speak not here against a free and ingenuous inquiry into all truth, according to our several abilities and opportunities; I plead not for captivating and enthralling our judgments to the dictates of men; I do not disparage the natural improvement of our faculties, by true knowledge, which is so noble and gallant a perfection of the mind. The thing which I aim against is, dispiriting the life and vigour of our religion by dry speculations, and making it nothing but a mere dead skeleton of opinions, a few dry bones tied up together, without any flesh and sinews; and misplacing, upon an eager prosecution of these opinions, all that zeal which should be spent to better purpose upon nobler objects.

Knowledge, indeed, is a thing far more excellent than riches, outward pleasures, worldly dignities, or anything else in the world besides holiness, and the conformity of our wills to the will of God; yet our happiness consists not in knowledge, but in a certain divine temper and constitution of soul, which is far above it.

But it is a piece of that corruption which

runs through human nature, that we naturally prize truth more than goodness, knowledge more than holiness. We think it a gallant thing to be fluttering up to heaven with our wings of knowledge and speculation; whereas, the highest mystery of a divine life here, and of perfect happiness hereafter, consists in nothing but mere obedience to the Divine will. Happiness is nothing but that inward sweet delight, which will arise from the harmonious agreement between our wills and the will of God.

There is nothing contrary to God in the whole world, nothing that fights against him, but self-will. This is the strong castle that we all keep garrisoned against Heaven, in every one of our hearts, which God continually layeth siege unto: and it must be conquered and demolished before we can conquer Heaven. It was by reason of this self-will that Adam fell in paradise—that those glorious angels, those morning stars, kept not their first station, but dropped down from heaven like falling stars, and sunk into that condition of bitterness, anxiety, and wretchedness, to which they are now reduced. They all entangle themselves with the length of their own wings;

they would needs will more, and otherwise, than God would will in them. And going about to make their wills wider, and to enlarge them into greater amplitude, the more they struggled, they found themselves the faster pinioned, and crowded up into narrowness and servility; infomuch, that now they are not able to use any wings at all, but, inheriting the serpent's curse, can only creep with their bellies upon the earth. Now, our only way to recover God and happiness again is, not to soar up with our understandings, but to destroy this self-will of ours; and then we shall find our wings grow again, our plumes fairly spread, and ourselves raised aloft into the free air of perfect liberty, which is perfect happiness.

There is nothing in the whole world able to do us good or hurt, but God and our own will; neither riches, nor poverty, nor disgrace, nor honour, nor life, nor death, nor angels, nor devils; but willing or not willing, as we ought. Should hell itself cast all its fiery darts against us, if our will be right, if it be informed by the Divine will, they can do us no hurt; we have then, if I may so speak, an enchanted shield, that is impenetrable, and will bear off all. God

will not hurt us, and hell cannot hurt us, if we will nothing but what God wills. Nay, then, we are actuated by God himself, and the whole Divinity flows in upon us; and when we have cashiered this self-will of ours, which did but shackle and confine our souls, our wills shall then become truly free, being widened and enlarged to the extent of God's own will. "Hereby we know, that we know Christ indeed," not by our speculative opinions concerning him, but "by our keeping of his commandments."

3. Thirdly, if hereby we are to judge whether we truly know Christ by our keeping of his commandments, so that, he that saith he knoweth him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar;—then, this was not the plot and design of the Gospel, to give the world, upon what pretence soever, an indulgence to sin.

But we are too prone to make such misconstructions of the Gospel; as if God had intended nothing else by it, but to dandle our corrupt nature, and contrive a smooth and easy way for us to attain happiness, without the toilsome labour of subduing our appetites and sinful affections; or, as if the

Gospel were nothing else but a declaration to the world of God's engaging his affections, from all eternity, on some particular persons, in such a manner that he would resolve to love them, and dearly to embrace them, though he never made them partakers of his image, in righteousness and true holiness; and though they should remain under the power of all their appetites, yet they should still continue his beloved ones, and he would, notwithstanding, bring them, at last, undoubtedly into heaven. Which is nothing else but to make the God whom we worship, the God of the New Testament, an acceptor of persons—one who encourages that in the world which is diametrically opposite to God's own life and being.

And, indeed, nothing is more ordinary than to shape out such monstrous and deformed notions of God to ourselves; looking upon him through the coloured medium of our own corrupt hearts, and having the eye of our soul tinged by the suffusions of our own desires. And therefore, because we mortals can fondly love and hate, and sometimes hug the vices of those to whom our affections are engaged, and kiss

their very deformities, we are ready to shape out a Deity like unto ourselves, and to fashion out such a god as will, in Christ at least, hug the very wickedness of the world; and, in those that are once his own—by I know not what fond affection, appropriated to himself—connive at their very sins, so that they shall not make the least breach between himself and them. Some there are who question whether of the two be the worse idolatry, and of the deeper stain, for a man to make a god out of “a piece of wood, and fall down unto it and worship it, and say, Deliver me, for thou art my god”—as it is expressed in the prophet Isaiah—or to set up such an idol-god as this of our own imagination, fashioned according to the similitude of our own fondness and wickedness: and, when we should paint God with the liveliest colours that we can possibly borrow from any created being, with the purest perfections that we can abstract from them, to draw him thus, with the black coal of our own corrupt hearts, and to make the very blots and blurs of our own souls constitute the letters by which we spell out his name. Thus do we, that are children of the night, make black and ugly represen-

tations of God unto ourselves, as the Ethiopians were wont to do—copying him out according to our own likeness, and setting up unto ourselves for a god that which we love most dearly in ourselves—that is, our appetites and passions. But there is no such god as this anywhere in the world, but only in some men's false imaginations, who know not, all this while, that they look upon themselves instead of God, and make an idol of themselves, which, instead of him, they worship and adore; being so full of themselves, that, whatsoever they see round about them, even God himself, they colour with their own tincture; like the person of whom Aristotle speaks, that, wheresoever he went, and whatsoever he looked upon, still saw his own face represented to him as in a glass. And, therefore, it is no wonder if men seem naturally more devoutly affected toward such an imaginary god as we have now described, than toward the true real God, clothed with his own real attributes; since it is nothing but an image of themselves with which, Narcissus-like, they fall in love. And no wonder, if they kiss and dandle such a baby-god as this, which, like little children, they have dressed up out of

the clouts of their own fond fancies, according to their own likenesses, on purpose that they might play and sport with it.

But howsoever we paint and disfigure him here below, God will ever dwell in spotless light; he will still be circled about with his own rays of unstained and immaculate glory. And though the Gospel be not God, as he is in his own brightness, but God veiled and masked to us, God in a state of humiliation, and condescend as the sun in a rainbow, yet it is nothing else but a clear and unspotted mirror of divine holiness, goodness, purity—in which attributes lie the very life and essence of God himself. The Gospel is God descending into the world in our form, and conversing with us in our likenesses, that he might allure and draw us up to God, and make us partakers of his divine form. “God was therefore incarnated, and made man, that he might deify us”—that is, as St Peter expresses it, make us “partakers of the divine nature.” Now, I say the very proper character, and essential tincture, of God himself, is nothing else but goodness. Nay, I may be bold to add, that God is therefore God, because he is the highest and most perfect good; and

good is not therefore good, because God, out of an arbitrary will of his, would have it so. Whatsoever God doeth in the world, he doeth it as suitable to the highest goodness—the idea and fairest copy of which is, his own essence.

Virtue and holiness in creatures, as Plato well discourses in his “*Euthyphro*,” are not therefore good because God loves them, and will have them to be accounted such; but rather, God therefore loves them, because they are, in themselves, simply good. Some of our own authors go a little further yet, and tell us that God does not fondly love himself, because he is himself; but therefore he loves himself, because he is the highest and most absolute goodness. So that, if there could be anything in the world better than God, God would love that better than himself; but because he is essentially the most perfect good, therefore he cannot but love his own goodness infinitely above all other things. And another mistake which sometimes we make respecting God is, shaping him out according to the model of ourselves, when we make him nothing but a blind, dark, impetuous self-will, running through the world

—such as we ourselves, who have not the ballast of absolute goodness to poise and settle us, are furiously actuated by.

That I may, therefore, come nearer to the subject in hand: God, who is absolute goodness, cannot love any of his creatures, and take pleasure in them, without bestowing upon them a communication of his goodness and likeness. God cannot make a Gospel, to promise men life and happiness hereafter, without being regenerated, and made partakers of his holiness. As soon may heaven and hell be reconciled, and lovingly shake hands with one another, as God can be fondly indulgent to any sin in whomsoever it be. As soon may light and darkness be espoused together, and midnight be married to noonday, as God can be joined in a league of friendship with any wicked soul.

The great design of God in the Gospel is, to clear up this mist of sin and corruption with which we are here surrounded, and to bring up his creatures out of the shadow of death to the region of light above, the land of truth and holiness. The great mystery of the Gospel is, to establish in the hearts of men a god-like frame and disposi-

tion of spirit, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. And Christ, who is the great and mighty Saviour, came into the world on purpose not only to save us from fire and brimstone, but also to save us from our sins. Christ has, therefore, made an expiation of our sins, by his death upon the cross, that we, being thus "delivered out of the hands of" these "our" greatest "enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." This "grace of God, that bringeth salvation," has therefore "appeared unto all men" in the Gospel, that it might "teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world—looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." "These things I write unto you," says the apostle, a little before my text, "that you sin not;" thus expressing the end of the whole Gospel, which is, not to cover sin, by spreading the purple robe of Christ's death and sufferings over it,

while it still remains in us, with all its filth and noisomeness unremoved, but to convey a powerful and mighty spirit of holiness, to cleanse us and free us from it. And this is a greater grace of God to us than the former, which still go both together in the Gospel—first, the free remission and pardon of sin in the blood of Christ; then, the delivering us from the power of sin, by the Spirit of Christ dwelling in our hearts.

Christ came not into the world merely to cast a mantle over us, and hide all our filthy sores from God's avenging eye with his merits and righteousness; but he came especially to be a surgeon and physician of souls, to free us from the filth and corruption of them—which is more grievous and burdensome, more noisome, to a true Christian, than the guilt of sin itself.

Should a poor, wretched, and diseased creature, full of sores and ulcers, be covered all over with purple, or clothed with scarlet, he would take but little contentment in it whilst his sores and wounds remain upon him; and he had much rather be arrayed in rags, so that he might obtain but soundness and health within. The Gospel is a true Bethesda, a pool of grace, where such

poor, lame, and infirm creatures as we are, upon the moving of God's Spirit, may descend down, not only to wash our skin and outside, but also to be cured of our diseases within. And, whatever the world thinks, there is a powerful Spirit that moves upon these waters—the waters, of the Gospel—spreading its gentle, healing, quickening wings over our souls. The Gospel is not like Abana and Pharpar, those common rivers of Damascus, that could only cleanse the outside: it is a true Jordan, in which such leprous Naamans as we all are “may wash and be clean.” “Blessed, indeed, are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” But yet, rather blessed are they whose sins are like a morning cloud, and quite taken away from them. Blessed, thrice “blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied: blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Our Saviour Christ came, as John the Baptist tells us, “with his fan in his hand, that he might thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into his garner: but

the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." He came, as the prophet Malachi speaks, "like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap; to sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and to purify all the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness."

Christ came, not only to write "Holiness to the Lord" upon Aaron's forehead, and to put his Urim and Thummim upon his breastplate, but "This is the covenant, saith the Lord, that I will make with them in those days: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." They shall be all kings and priests unto me. "God sent his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and, by a sacrifice for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

The first Adam, as the Scripture tells us, brought in a real defilement, which, like a noisome leprosy, has overspread all mankind: and therefore the second Adam must not only fill the world with a conceit of

holiness, and mere imaginary righteousness, but he must really convey such an immortal seed of grace into the hearts of believers, as may prevail still more and more in them, till it have at last quite wrought out that poison of the serpent.

Christ, who was, in fact, Divinity dwelling in a tabernacle of flesh, and God himself immediately actuating a human nature, came into the world to kindle here among men that divine life which is certainly dearer to God than anything else whatsoever in the world, and to propagate this celestial fire continually, from one heart unto another, until the end of the world. Neither is he, nor was he, ever absent from this spark of his divinity kindled amongst men, wheresoever it be, though he seem bodily to be withdrawn from us. He is the standing, constant, inexhausted fountain of this divine light and heat, that still touches every soul that is enlivened by it with an outstretched ray, and freely lends his beams and disperses his influence to all, from the beginning of the world to the end of it. "We all receive of his fulness, grace for grace;" as all the stars in heaven are said to light their candles at the sun's flame. For though

his body be withdrawn from us, yet, by the lively and virtual contact of his Spirit, he is always kindling, cheering, quickening, warming, and enlivening hearts. Nay, this divine life, begun and kindled in any heart, wheresoever it be, is something of God in flesh, and, in a sober and qualified sense, Divinity incarnate; and all particular Christians, that are really possessed of it, are so many mystical Christs.

And God forbid that God's own life and nature, here in the world, should be forlorn, forsaken, and abandoned of God himself. Certainly, wherever it is, though never so little, like a sweet, young, tender babe, once born in any heart, when it crieth unto God the father of it, with pitiful and bemoaning looks imploring his compassion, it cannot choose but move his fatherly bowels, and make them yearn and turn towards it, and, by strong sympathy, draw his compassionate arm to help and relieve it. Never was any tender infant so dear to its human parent as an infant new-born Christ, formed in the heart of any true believer, to God the father of it. Shall the children of this world, the sons of darkness, be moved with such tender affection and compassion towards the

fruit of their bodies, their own natural offspring? and shall God, the Father of lights, the Fountain of all goodness, be moved with no compassion towards his true spiritual offspring, and have no regard to those sweet babes of light, engendered by his own beams in men's hearts, who, in their lovely countenances, bear the resemblance of his own face, and call him their father? Shall he see them lie fainting, and gasping, and dying here in the world, for want of nothing to preserve and keep them but an influence from him, who first gave them life and breath? No: hear the language of God's heart—hear the sounding of his bowels towards them: "Is it Ephraim, my dear son? is it that pleasant child? Since I spake of him, I do earnestly remember him; my bowels, my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." If those expressions of goodness and tender affection here, among the creatures, be but drops of that full ocean which is in God, how then can we imagine that this father of our spirits should have so little regard to his own dear offspring—I do not say to our souls, but to that which is the very life and soul of our souls, the life

of God in us—which is nothing else but God's own self communicated to us, his own Son born in our hearts—as that he should suffer it to be cruelly murdered in its infancy by our sins, and, like young Hercules, in its very cradle to be strangled by those vipers?—that he should see him crucified by fleshly lusts, nailed fast to the cross by invincible corruptions, pierced and gored on every side with the poisonous spears of the devil's temptations, and at last giving up the ghost, and yet that his tender heart should not at all relent, nor be, all this while, impassioned with so sad a spectacle? Surely we cannot think he hath such an adamantine breast, such a flinty nature as this is.

What then? Must we say, that, though indeed he be willing, yet he is not able, to rescue his crucified and tormented Son, now bleeding upon the cross, to take him down from thence, and save him? Then must sin be more powerful than God; that weak, crazy, and sickly thing more strong than the Rock of ages; and the devil, the prince of darkness, more mighty than the God of light. No, surely; there is a weakness and impotency in all evil, but a masculine strength

and vigour in all goodness; and therefore, doubtless, the highest good is the strongest thing in the world. God's power displayed in the world is nothing but his goodness strongly reaching all things, from height to depth, from the highest heaven to the lowest hell, and irresistibly imparting itself to everything, according to those several degrees in which it is capable of receiving the heavenly visitant.

Have the fiends of darkness, then—those poor forlorn spirits which are fettered and chained up in the chains of their own wickedness—any strength to withstand the force of infinite goodness, which is infinite power? Or, do they not rather skulk in holes of darkness, and fly, like bats and owls, before the approaching beams of this Sun of Righteousness? Is God powerful to kill and to destroy, to damn and to torment? And is he not powerful to save? Nay, it is the sweetest flower in all the garland of his attributes, it is the richest diadem in his crown of glory, that he is *mighty to save*: and this is far more noble and magnificent than to be styled *mighty to destroy*. For that, except it be in a way of justice, speaks no power but mere impotency; for the root of all power is goodness.

Or must we say, lastly, that God indeed, when we sigh and groan towards him, is able to rescue us out of the power of sin and Satan, but that, sometimes, to exercise his absolute authority, his uncontrollable dominion, he delights rather in plunging wretched souls down into infernal night and everlasting darkness? What shall we, then, make the God of the whole world? Nothing but a cruel and dreadful *Erinnys*, with curled fiery snakes about his head, and fire-brands in his hands, thus governing the world? Surely this will make us either secretly to think, that, if he must needs be such, there is no God at all in the world, or else to wish heartily that there were none. But, doubtless, God will at last confute all these our misapprehensions; he will unmask our hypocritical pretences, and clearly cast the shame of all our sinful deficiencies upon ourselves; and will vindicate his own glory from receiving by them the least stain or blemish. In the meantime, let us know that the Gospel now requires far more of us than the law ever did; for it requires a new creature, a divine nature, Christ formed within us; but then it bestows a quickening spirit, an enlivening power, to enable

us to perform that which is required of us. Whosoever, therefore, truly knows Christ, the same also keepeth Christ's commandments. But "he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

I have now done with the first part of my discourse, concerning those observations which arise naturally from the words, and offer themselves to our acceptance. I shall, in the next place, proceed to make some general application of them all together.

Now, therefore, I beseech you, let us consider whether we know Christ indeed; not by our acquaintance with systems and models of divinity, not by our skill in books and papers, but by our keeping Christ's commandments. All the books and writings with which we converse can but represent spiritual objects to our understandings; which yet we can never see in their own true figure, colour, and proportion, until we have a divine light within to irradiate and shine upon them. Though there be never such excellent truths fet down in words and letters concerning Christ and his Gospel, yet they will be but unknown characters to us, until we have a willing spirit within us

that can decipher them—until, by secret whispers in our hearts, the same spirit which at first indited them, become a commentary upon them. There are many that understand the Greek and Hebrew of the Scripture, the original languages in which the text was written, who never understood the language of the Spirit.

There is a flesh and a spirit, a body and a soul, in all the writings of Scripture. It is but the flesh and body of divine truths that is printed upon paper; which alone many moths of books and libraries feed upon; many walking skeletons of knowledge, who bury and entomb truths in the living sepulchres of their souls, and converse only with these; men who never did anything else but pick at the mere bark and rind of truths, and crack the shells of them. But there is a soul and spirit of divine truth, which could never yet be congealed into ink; which could never be blotted upon paper; which, by a secret traduction and conveyance, passes from one soul unto another, being able to dwell or lodge nowhere but in a spiritual being, in a living thing, because itself is nothing but life and spirit. Neither can it, where indeed it is, express itself suf-

ficiently in words and sounds; it will best declare and speak itself in actions; as the old manner of writing among the Egyptians was, not by words, but things. The life of divine truths is better expressed in actions than in words, because actions are more living things than words. Words are nothing but dead resemblances and pictures of those truths which live and breathe in actions; and "the kingdom of God," as the apostle speaks, "consisteth not in word," but in life and power. "Sheep do not come and bring their fodder to their shepherd, and show him how much they eat; but, inwardly concocting and digesting it, they make it appear by the fleece which they wear upon their backs, and by the milk which they give." And let not us Christians affect only to talk and dispute of Christ, and so measure our knowledge of him by our words; but let us show our knowledge concocted into our lives and actions; and then let us really manifest that we are Christ's sheep indeed, that we are his disciples, by that fleece of holiness which we wear, and by the fruits which we daily yield in our lives and conversations; for "herein," saith Christ, "is my Father glorified, that ye

bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

Let us not, I beseech you, judge of our knowing Christ, by our ungrounded persuasions, that Christ, from all eternity, hath loved us, and given himself particularly for us, without the conformity of our lives to Christ's commandments, without a real participation of the image of Christ in our hearts. The great mystery of the Gospel does not lie in Christ without us only (though we must know, also, what he has done for us); but the very pith and kernel of it consists in Christ inwardly formed in our hearts. ♣

Nothing is truly ours, but what lives in our spirits. Salvation itself cannot save us, as long as it is only without us, any more than health can cure us and make us sound, when it is not within us, but somewhere at a distance from us; any more than arts and sciences, whilst they lie only in books and papers without us, can make us learned. The Gospel, though it be a sovereign and medicinal thing itself, yet the mere knowing and believing of its history will do us no good; we can receive no virtue from it till it be inwardly digested and concocted into our souls—till it be made ours, and

become a living thing in our hearts. The Gospel, if it be only without us, cannot save us, any more than that physician's bill could cure the ignorant patient of his disease, who, when it was commended to him, took the paper only, and put it up in his pocket, but never drank the potion that was described in it.

All that Christ did for us in the flesh, when he was here upon earth, from his lying in a manger, when he was born in Bethlehem, to his bleeding upon the cross on
★ Golgotha, will not save us from our sins, unless Christ by his Spirit dwell in us. It will not avail us to believe that he was born of a virgin, unless the power of the Most High overshadow our hearts, and beget him there likewise. It will not profit us to believe that he died upon the cross for us, unless, by the mortification of all our evil affections, we be baptised into his death—unless the old man of sin be crucified in our hearts. Christ, indeed, has made an expiation for our sins upon his cross, and the blood of Christ is the only sovereign balsam to free us from their guilt. But yet, besides the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon us, we must be made partakers also

of his spirit. Christ came into the world, as well to redeem us from the power and bondage, as to free us from the guilt, of our sins. "Ye know," says St John, "that he was manifested to take away our sins: whosoever, therefore, abideth in him, sinneth not; whosoever sinneth, hath not seen him, neither known him." Lo, the end of Christ's coming into the world! Lo, a design worthy of God manifested in the flesh!

Christ did not take all those pains to lay aside his robes of glory, and come down hither into the world, to enter into a virgin's womb, to be born in our human shape, to be laid a poor crying infant in a manger, and having no form or comeliness, to take upon him the form of a servant, to undergo a reproachful and ignominious life, and at last to be abandoned to a shameful death, a death upon the cross,—he did not do all this, I say, merely to bring a notion into the world, without producing any real, substantial effect; without changing, mending, and reforming the world; so that men should still be as wicked and as much under the power of the prince of darkness as they were before, only they should not be thought so; so that they should still remain as full

of all the filthy fores of sin and corruption as before, only they should be accounted whole. Shall God come down from heaven, and pitch a tabernacle amongst men? shall he undertake such a vast design, and make so great a display of doing something? which, when it is all summed up, shall not at last amount to a reality? Surely Christ did not undergo all this to so little purpose; he would not take all this pains for us, that he might be able at last to put into our hands nothing but a blank. He "was with child," he "was in pain and travail;" and hath "he brought forth nothing but wind? hath he been delivered of the east wind?" Has that great design, which was so long carried in the womb of eternity, now proved abortive, or else nothing but a mere windy birth? No, surely: the end of the Gospel is life and perfection; it is a divine nature; it is a godlike frame and disposition of spirit; it is to make us partakers of the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, without which, salvation itself were but a notion.

Christ came into the world to make an expiation for our sins; but the end of this was, that we might eschew sin, that we

might forsake all ungodliness and worldly lusts. The Gospel declares pardon of sin to those that are heavy laden with it, and willing to be disburdened; to this end, that it might quicken and enliven us to new obedience. Whereas otherwise the guilt of sin might have detained us in horror and despair, and so have kept us still more strongly under its power, in sad and dismal apprehensions of God's wrath provoked against us, and inevitably falling on us: but Christ has now appeared like a day-star, with most cheerful beams; nay, he is the Sun of Righteousness himself, who has risen upon the world, with his healing wings, with his exhilarating light, that he might chase away from us all those black despairing thoughts. But Christ did not rise that we should play, and sport, and wantonise with his light; but that we should do "the work of the day" in it; that we should walk, not in our night-clothes of sinful deformity, but clad all over with the comely garments of light. The Gospel is not great with child of a fancy, of a mere conceit of righteousness without us, hanging at a distance over us, whilst our hearts within are nothing but cages of unclean birds, and like

houses continually haunted with devils, nay, the very rendezvous of those fiends of darkness.

Holiness is the best thing that God himself can bestow upon us, either in this world or the world to come. True evangelical holiness—that is, Christ formed in the hearts of believers—is the very cream and quintessence of the Gospel. And, were our hearts sound within, were there not many thick and dark fumes which arise from thence, and cloud our understandings, we could not easily conceive the substance of heaven itself to be anything else but holiness, freed from those encumbrances which ever clogged and accloyed it here; neither should we wish for any other heaven besides this. But many of us are like those children whose stomachs are so vitiated by some disease, that they think ashes, coal, mud-wall, or any such trash, more pleasant than the most wholesome food. Such sickly and distempered appetites have we about these spiritual things, hankering after I know not what vain shows of happiness, whilst, in the meantime, we neglect that which is the only true food of our souls, which is able to nourish them unto everlasting life.

Grace is holiness militant—holiness encumbered with many enemies and difficulties, which it ever fights against, and manfully acquits itself. And glory is nothing else but holiness triumphant—holiness with a palm of victory in her hand, and a crown upon her head. “God himself cannot make me happy if he be only without me, and unless he vouchsafe a participation of himself and his own likeness into my soul.” Happiness is nothing but the releasing and unfettering of our souls from all narrow, scant, and particular good things, and the espousing of them to the highest and most universal good, which is not this or that particular good, but goodness itself: and this is the same thing which we call holiness. With which, because we ourselves are so little acquainted, for the most part ever courting its mere shadow, therefore we have such low, abject, and beggarly conceits of it; whereas, it is in itself the most noble, heroic, and generous thing in the world. For I mean by holiness nothing else but God stamped and printed on the soul. And we may please ourselves with what conceits we will; but, so long as we are void of this, we do but dream of heaven, and I

know not what fond paradise; we do but blow up and down an airy bubble of our own fancies, which rises out of the froth of our vain hearts; we do but court a painted heaven, and woo happiness in a picture; whilst, in the meantime, a true and real hell will absorb our souls into it, and will soon make us sensible of solid woe and substantial misery.

Divine wisdom has so ordered the frame of the whole universe, that everything should have a certain proper place, a fit receptacle for it. Hell is the sink of all sin and wickedness. The strong magic of nature pulls and draws everything continually to that place which is suitable to it, and to which it belongs. So all heavy bodies press downwards towards the centre of our earth, drawn in by its attraction. In like manner, hell, wheresoever it is, will by strong sympathy pull in all sin, and magnetically draw it to itself. While true holiness is always breathing upwards, and fluttering towards heaven, striving to embosom itself with God: and it will at last undoubtedly be conjoined with him; no dismal shades of darkness can possibly stop it in its course, or bear it back. Nay, we do but deceive our-

selves with names. Hell is nothing but the orb of sin and wickedness, that hemisphere of darkness in which all evil moves; and heaven is the opposite hemisphere of light, the bright orb of truth, holiness, and goodness. And in this life we actually instate ourselves in the possession of one or other of them. Take sin and disobedience out of hell, and it will presently clear up into light, tranquillity, serenity, and shine out into a heaven. Every true saint carries his heaven about with him in his own heart; and hell, that is without, can have no power over him. He might safely wade through hell itself, and, like the three children, pass through the midst of that fiery furnace, and yet not at all be scorched with its flames. He might walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and yet fear no evil.

Sin is the only thing in the world that is contrary to God. God is light, and that is darkness: God is beauty, and that is ugliness and deformity. All sin is direct rebellion against God; and with what notions soever we sugar it and sweeten it, yet God can never smile upon it, he will never make a truce with it. God declares open war against sin, and bids defiance to it; for

it is a professed enemy to God's own life and being. God, who is infinite goodness, cannot but hate sin, which is purely evil. Sin is, in itself, but a poor, impotent, and crazy thing, nothing but straitness, poverty, and nonentity; so that, of itself, it is the most wretched and miserable thing in the world, and needs no further punishment besides itself. Divine vengeance beats it off still further and further from God, and, where-soever it is, will be sure to scourge it and lash it continually. God and sin can never agree together.

That I may, therefore, yet come nearer to ourselves. This is the message which I have now to declare unto you—That “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all: if we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.” Christ and the Gospel are light, and in them there is no darkness at all. If you say that you know Christ and his Gospel, and yet keep not Christ's commandments, but dearly hug your private darling corruptions, you are liars, and the truth is not in you; you have no acquaintance with the God of light, nor the Gospel of light. If any of you say that you know Christ,

and have an interest in him, and yet, as I fear too many do, still nourish ambition, pride, vainglory, within your breasts; harbour malice, revengefulness, and cruel hatred to your neighbours, in your hearts; eagerly scramble after sordid pelf, and make the strength of your parts and endeavours serve that blind mammon, the god of this world; if you wallow and tumble in the filthy puddle of fleshly pleasures; or if, in your lives, you aim only at selfish ends, and make interest the compass by which you sail, and the star by which you steer your course, looking at nothing higher or more noble than yourselves;—if these things be so, then deceive not yourselves; you have neither seen Christ, nor know him; you are deeply incorporated, if I may so speak, with the spirit of this world; and have no true sympathy with God and Christ, no fellowship at all with the Father and the Son.

And I beseech you, let us consider: Are there not many of us, who pretend much to Christ, that are plainly, in our lives, as proud, ambitious, vainglorious, as any others? Are there not many of us as much under the power of unruly passions, as cruel, revengeful, malicious, censorious as others?

Many that have our minds as deeply engaged in the world, and as much envassalled to riches, gain, profit, those great admired deities of the sons of men, and their souls as much overwhelmed and sunk, with the cares of this life? Do not many of us as much give ourselves to the pleasures of the flesh, and, though not without regrets of conscience, yet, every now and then, secretly soak ourselves in them? Are there not many of us who have as deep a share, likewise, in injustice and oppression, in vexing the fatherless and the widows? I wish it may not prove some of our cases, at that last day, to use such pleas as these unto Christ in our behalf:—"Lord, I have prophesied in thy name; I have preached many a zealous sermon for thee; I have kept many a long fast; I have been very active for thy cause in church, in state; nay, I never made any question but that my name was written in thy book of life:" when yet, alas! we shall receive no other return from Christ but this—"I know you not; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." I am sure there are too many of us who have long pretended to Christ, and yet make little or no progress in true Christianity—that is,

in holiness of life; men who ever hang hovering in a twilight of grace; who never seriously put ourselves forward into clear daylight, but esteem that glimmering *crepusculum* which we are in, and like that faint twilight better than broad, open, meridian splendour; whereas "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." I am sure there are many of us who are perpetual dwarfs in our spiritual stature, like those silly women, laden with sins, and led away by strange desires, who are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth;" who are not now one jot taller in Christianity than we were many years ago, but have still as sickly, crazy, and unsound a temper of soul as we had long before.

Indeed, we seem to do something; we are always moving and lifting at the stone of corruption which lies upon our hearts, but yet we never stir it, or at least never roll it off from us. We are sometimes a little troubled with the guilt of our sins, and then we think we must thrust our desires out of our hearts; but afterwards we sprinkle ourselves over with I know not what holy

water, and so are contented to let those desires still abide quietly within us. We every day truly confess the same sins, and pray against them; and yet we still commit them as much as ever, and lie as deeply under the power of them. We have the same water to pump out, in every prayer; and still we let the same leak in again upon us. We make a great deal of noise, and raise a great deal of dust with our feet; but we do not move from off the ground on which we stood; we do not at all go forward. Or, if we do sometimes make a little progress, we quickly lose again the ground which we had gained; like those upper planets in the heaven which, as the astronomers tell us, sometimes move forward, sometimes quite backward, and sometimes perfectly stand still—have their stations and retrogradations, as well as their direct motions. As if religion were nothing else but a dancing up and down upon the same piece of ground, and making several motions and friskings on it, and not a sober journeying and travelling onwards toward some certain place. We do and undo; we weave sometimes a web of holiness, but then we let our passions come and undo and unravel all

again. Like Sisyphus in the fable, we roll up a mighty stone, with much ado, sweating and tugging up the hill, and then we let it go, and tumble down again unto the bottom; and this is our constant work. Like those Danaides, whom the poets speak of, we are always, by our prayers, duties, and performances, filling water into a sieve, which still runs out as fast as we pour it in.

What is it that thus cheats us, and gulls us of our religion? that makes us thus constantly tread the same ring and circle of duties, where we make not any progress forward, and how far soever we go, we are still never the nearer to our journey's end? What is it which thus starves our religion, and makes it look like those kine in Pharaoh's dream, ill-favoured and lean-fleshed, no colour in its face, no blood in its veins, no life nor heat in any of its members? What is it that thus bedwarfs us in our Christianity? By what low, fordid, unworthy principles do we act, which thus hinder our growth, and make us stand at a stay, and keep us always at the very porch and entrance, where we first began? Is it a sleepy, sluggish conceit, that it is enough for us if we be but once in a state of grace—if we

have but once stepped over the threshold—that we need not take so great pains to travel any farther? Or is it another damping, choking, stifling opinion that Christ has done all for us already without us, and nothing more needs to be done within us? No matter how wicked we are in ourselves, for we have holiness without us; no matter how sickly and diseased our souls are within; for they have health without them. Why may we not as well be satisfied and contented to have happiness, too, without us to all eternity, and to ourselves for ever continue miserable? “Little children, let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous; but he that committeth sin is of the devil.” I shall therefore exhort you, in the wholesome words of St Peter: “Give all diligence, to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity. For, if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The apostle still goes

on, and I cannot leave him yet. "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was once purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall." Let us not only talk and dispute of Christ, but let us indeed "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Having those "great and precious promises" which he hath given us, let us strive to be made "partakers of the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust;" and being begotten again to a lively hope of enjoying Christ hereafter, "let us purify ourselves, even as he is pure."

Let us really declare that we know Christ, that we are his disciples, by our keeping his commandments, and, among the rest, that commandment especially which our Saviour Christ himself commends to his disciples in a peculiar manner—"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you;" and again—"These things I command you, that ye love one another." Let us follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man

shall see the Lord. Let us put on, as the elect of God holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave us: and above all these things let us put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Let us in meekness instruct those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snares of the devil who are taken captive by him at his will. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and whosoever loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

O divine love!—the sweet harmony of souls—the music of angels—the joy of God's own heart—the very darling of his bosom—the source of true happiness—the pure quintessence of heaven—that which reconciles the jarring principles of the world, and makes them all chime together—that which melts men's hearts into one another! See how St Paul describes it, and you cannot choose but have your affections enamoured towards it: Love envieth not, is not puffed

up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." I may add, in a word, it is the best-natured thing, the best-complexioned thing, in the world. Let us express this sweet harmonious affection, in these jarring times; that so, if it be possible, we may tune the world into better music. Especially in matters of religion let us strive, with all meekness, to instruct and convince one another. Let us endeavour to promote the Gospel of peace, the dove-like Gospel, with a dove-like spirit. This was the way by which the Gospel at first was propagated in the world. Christ "did not cry, nor lift up his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he did not break, and the smoking flax he did not quench;" and yet "he brought forth judgment unto victory." He whispered the Gospel to us from Mount Zion in a still voice; and yet the sound thereof went out quickly throughout all the earth. The Gospel at first came down upon the world gently and softly, like the dew upon Gideon's fleece; and yet it quickly penetrated quite through it: and

doubtless this is still the most effectual way to promote it further. Sweetness and ingenuofness will more command men's minds than passion, sourness, and severity; as the soft pillow sooner breaks the flint than the hardest marble. Let us follow truth in love; and of the two, indeed, be contented rather to miss conveying a speculative truth, than to part with love. When, by the strength of truth, we would convince men of any error, let us withal pour the sweet balm of love upon their heads. Truth and love are the two most powerful things in the world; and when they both go together, they cannot easily be withstood. The golden beams of truths and the silken cords of love, twisted together, will draw men forward with a sweet violence whether they will or not.

Let us take heed lest we sometimes call that zeal for God and his Gospel, which is nothing else but our own tempestuous and stormy passion. True zeal is a sweet, heavenly, and gentle flame, which makes us active for God, but always within the sphere of love. It never calls for fire from heaven to consume those who differ a little from us in their apprehensions. It is like that kind

of lightning which the philosophers speak of, that melts the sword within, but singes not the scabbard; it strives to save the soul, but hurts not the body. True zeal is a loving thing, and makes us always active to edification, and not to destruction. If we keep the fire of zeal within the chimney, in its own proper place, it never does any hurt; it only warms, quickens, and enlivens: but, if once we let it break out, and catch hold of the thatch of our flesh, and kindle our corrupt nature, and set the house of our body on fire, it is no longer zeal, it is no heavenly fire, it is a most destructive and devouring thing. True zeal is a soft and gentle flame, which will not scorch one's hand; it is no predatory or voracious thing: but carnal and fleshly zeal is like the spirit of gunpowder set on fire, which tears and blows up all that stands before it. True zeal is like the vital heat in us that we live upon, which we never feel to be angry or troublesome; but, though it gently feed upon the radical oil within us, that sweet balsam of our natural moisture, yet it lives lovingly with it, and maintains that by which it is fed: but that other furious and dis-tempered zeal is nothing else but a fever in

the soul. To conclude, we may learn what kind of zeal it is that we should make use of in promoting the Gospel, by an emblem of God's own, given us in the Scripture—those fiery tongues which, on the day of Pentecost, sat upon the apostles, which sure were harmless flames; for we cannot read that they did any hurt, or that they did so much as singe a hair of their heads.

I will therefore shut up this advice with that of the apostle—"Let us keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Let this soft and silken knot of love tie our hearts together; though our heads and apprehensions cannot meet, as indeed they never will, but always stand at some distance from one another. Our zeal, if it be heavenly, if it be true vestal fire kindled from above, will not delight to tarry here below, burning up straw, and stubble, and such combustible things, and sending up nothing but gross and earthy fumes to heaven; but it will rise up, and return back pure as it came down, and will ever be striving to carry up men's hearts to God along with it. It will be occupied about the promoting of those things only which are unquestionably good; and when it moves in the

irascible way, it will quarrel with nothing but sin. Here let our zeal busy and exercise itself, every one of us beginning first at our own hearts. Let us be more zealous than ever we have yet been in fighting against our inordinate desires, in pulling down these strongholds of sin and Satan in our hearts. Here let us exercise all our courage and resolution, all our manhood and magnanimity.

Let us trust in the almighty arm of our God, and doubt not but he will as well deliver us from the power of sin in our hearts as preserve us from the wrath to come. Let us go out against these uncircumcised Philistines—I mean our appetites and passions—not with shield or spear, not in any confidence of our own strength, but in the name of the Lord of Hosts, and we shall prevail, we shall overcome; “for greater is he that is in us, than he that is in them. The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; he shall thrust out all enemies from before us; and he shall say, Destroy them.” We shall enter the true Canaan, the good land of promise, “that floweth with milk and honey,” the land of truth and holiness.

“Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand. Let your loins be girt about with truth, have on the breastplate of righteousness, and let your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, take the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” And lastly, be sure of this, that ye “be strong in the Lord only, and in the power of his might.”

There are some who dishearten us in this spiritual warfare, and would make us let our weapons fall out of our hands, by working in us a despair of victory. There are some evil spies, who weaken the hands and hearts of the children of Israel, and bring an ill report upon that land which we are to conquer, telling of nothing but strange giants, the sons of Anak, there, whom we shall never be able to overcome. “The Amalekites dwell in the south: the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, in the mountains; and the Canaanites by the sea-coast;”—huge armies of tall invincible desires. “We shall never be able to go against this people.”

we shall never be able to prevail against our corruptions. Harken not unto them, I beseech you, but hear what Caleb and Joshua say: "Let us go up at once, and possess it, for we are able to overcome them," not by our own strength, but by the power of the Lord of Hosts. There are, indeed, sons of Anak there; there are mighty giant-like hosts, with whom we are to grapple; nay, there are principalities and powers, too, that we are to oppose: but the great Michael, the captain of the Lord's host, is with us; he commands in chief for us, and we need not be dismayed. "Understand, therefore, this day, that the Lord thy God is he which goeth before thee as a consuming fire; he shall destroy these enemies, and bring them down before thy face." If thou wilt be faithful to him, and put thy trust in him, as the fire consumeth the stubble, and as the flame burneth up the chaff, so will he destroy thy inordinate desires; their root shall be rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as the dust.

But let us take heed that we be not discouraged, and, before we begin to fight, despair of victory; for, to believe and hope well in the power of our God and in his

strength, will be half a conquest. Let us not think holiness in the hearts of men here, in the world, is a forlorn, forsaken, and outcast thing from God, and that he hath no regard for holiness. Wherever it is, though never so small, if it be but hearty and sincere, it can no more be cut off and discontinued from God, than a sunbeam here upon earth can be broken off from its intercourse with the sun, and be left alone amidst the mire and dirt of this world. The sun may as well discard its own rays, and banish them from itself into some region of darkness far remote from it, where they shall have no dependence upon it, as God can forsake and abandon holiness in the world, and leave it a poor orphan thing that shall have no influence from Him to preserve and keep it. Holiness, wherever it be, is something of God; it is an efflux from him, that always hangs upon him, and lives in him; as the sunbeams, although they gild this lower world, and spread their golden wings over us, yet they are not so much here, where they shine, as in the sun, from whence they flow. God cannot draw a curtain between himself and holiness, which is nothing but the splendour and

shining of himself; he cannot hide his face from it; he cannot desert it in the world. He that is born of God, shall overcome the world, and the prince of this world too, by the power of God in him. Holiness is no solitary neglected thing; it has stronger confederacies, greater alliances, than sin and wickedness. It is in league with God and the universe; the whole creation smiles upon it; there is something of God in it; and therefore it must needs be a victorious and triumphant thing.

Wickedness is a weak, cowardly, and guilty thing, a fearful and trembling shadow. It is the child of ignorance and darkness; it is afraid of light, and cannot possibly withstand its power, nor endure the sight of its glittering armour. It is allied to none but wretched, forlorn, and apostate spirits, who do what they can to support their own weak and tottering kingdom of darkness, but are only strong in weakness and impotency. The whole polity and commonwealth of devils is not so powerful as one child of light, one babe in Christ; they are not able to quench the least smoking flax, to extinguish one spark of grace. Darkness is not able to make

resistance against light, but ever, as it comes, flies before it. But if wickedness invite the society of devils, so that those cursed fiends most readily apply themselves to it, and offer their service to feed and encourage it, because it is their own life and nature, their own kingdom of darkness, which they strive to enlarge, and to spread its dominions, shall we therefore think that holiness, which is so nearly allied to God, has no good genius in the world to attend upon it, to help it, and encourage it? Shall not the kingdom of light be as true to its own interest, and as vigilant for its self-enlargement, as the kingdom of darkness? Holiness is never alone in the world; God is always with it, and his loving Spirit ever associates and joins itself to it. He that sent it into the world is with it, as Christ speaketh of himself—"The Father hath not left me alone, because I do always those things that please him." Holiness is the life of God, which, wheresoever it is, he cannot but feed and maintain: and as devils are always active to encourage evil, so we cannot imagine but that the heavenly host of blessed angels above are busily employed in the promoting of that which they love best, that which is

dearest to God, whom they serve, the life and nature of God in the soul. "There is joy in heaven at the conversion of one sinner;" heaven gladly takes notice of it; there is a choir of angels that sweetly sings the epithalamium of a soul divorced from sin and Satan, and espoused unto Christ. What, therefore, the wise man speaks concerning wisdom, I shall apply to holiness: "Take fast hold of holiness, let her not go, keep her, for she is thy life: keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," and of death too. Let nothing be esteemed by thee of greater consequence and concernment than what thou doest and adest, how thou livest. Nothing without can make us either happy or miserable; nothing can either defile or hurt us, but what goes out from us, what springs and bubbles up out of our own hearts. We have dreadful apprehensions of the flames of hell without us; we tremble, and are afraid, when we hear of fire and brimstone; whilst, in the meantime, we securely nourish within our own hearts a true and living hell. The dark fire of our appetites and passions consumes our bowels within, and miserably scorches our souls, and we are not troubled

at it. We do not perceive how hell steals upon us whilst we live here. And as for heaven, we only gaze abroad, expecting that it should come to us from without, but never look for the beginnings of it to arise within our own hearts.

But, lest there should yet haply remain any prejudice against that which I have all this while heartily commended to you, "true holiness," and the "keeping of Christ's commandments," as if it were a legal and a servile thing, that would subject us to a state of bondage, I must here needs add a word or two, either for the prevention or removal of that prejudice. I do not, therefore, mean by holiness the mere performance of the outward duties of religion, coldly acted over as a task; nor our habitual prayings, hearings, fastings, multiplied one upon another, though these be all good, as subservient to a higher end: but I mean an inward soul and principle of divine life, which inspirits all these; which enlivens and quickens the dead carcase of all outward performances whatsoever. I do not here urge the "dead law of outward works," which indeed, if it be alone, subjects us to a "state of bondage;" but the inward law

of the Gospel, the "law of the spirit of life," than which nothing can be more free and ingenuous; for it does not act by principles without us, but is an inward self-moving principle living in our hearts.

The first, though it work us into some outward conformity to God's commandments, and so has a good effect upon the world, yet we are, all this while, but like dead instruments of music, that sound sweetly and harmoniously only when they are struck and played upon from without by the musician's hand, who has the theory and law of music living within himself.

But the second, the living law of the Gospel, the "law of the Spirit of life" within us, is as if the soul of music should incorporate itself with the instrument, and live in the strings, and make them, of their own accord, without any touch or impulse from without, dance up and down, and warble out their harmonies.

They that are actuated only by an outward law are but like *neurospasts*, or those little puppets that skip nimbly up and down, and seem to be full of quick and sprightly motion; whereas they are all the while

moved artificially by certain wires and strings from without, and not by any principle of motion from themselves within; or else they are like clocks and watches, which go pretty regularly for awhile, but are moved by weights and plummets, or some other artificial springs, which must be every now and then wound up, or else they cease.

But they who are actuated by the new law of the Gospel, by the "law of the Spirit," have an inward principle of life in them, which, from its own centre, puts forth itself freely and constantly into all obedience to the will of Christ. This new law of the Gospel is a kind of musical soul, informing the dead organs of our hearts, which makes them, of their own accord, delight to act harmoniously, according to the rule of God's Word.

The law of which I speak is a law of love, the most powerful law in the world; and yet it frees us, in a manner, from all law without us, because it makes us become a law unto ourselves. The more it prevails in us, the more it eats up and devours all other laws without us; just as Aaron's living rod swallowed up those rods of the

magicians, which were made only to counterfeit a little life. Love is at once a freedom from all law, a state of purest liberty, and yet a law, too, of the most constraining and indispensable necessity.

The worst law in the world is the "law of sin which is in our members," which keeps us in a condition of most absolute slavery, when we are wholly under the tyrannical commands of our passions. This is a cruel Pharaoh indeed, who sets his hard taskmasters over us, and makes us wretchedly drudge in mire and clay.

The law of the letter without us sets us in a condition of a little more liberty, by restraining us from many outward acts of sin; but it does not disenthral us from the power of sin in our hearts.

But the "law of the Spirit of life," the Gospel law of love, puts us into a condition of most pure and perfect liberty; and whosoever really entertains this law has "thrust out Hagar" quite; he has "cast out the bondwoman and her children;" from henceforth Sarah, the free woman, shall live for ever with him, and she shall be to him a mother of many children; her seed shall be "as the sand of the sea-shore

for number," and "as the stars of heaven." Here is evangelical liberty, here is Gospel freedom, when "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and death"—when we have a liberty *from* sin, and not a liberty *to* sin; for our Lord and Master hath told us, that "whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of it."

He that lies under the power and vassalage of his base appetites, and yet talks of Gospel freedom, is but like a poor condemned prisoner, who, in his sleep, dreams of being set at liberty, and of walking up and down wheresoever he pleases, whilst his legs are all the while locked fast in fetters and irons. To please ourselves with a notion of Gospel liberty, while we have not a Gospel principle of holiness within to free us from the power of sin, is nothing else but to gild over our bonds and fetters, and to fancy ourselves the inmates of a golden cage. There is a straitness, slavery, and narrowness in sin. Sin crowds and crumples up our souls, which, if they were freely spread abroad, would be as wide and as large as the whole universe.

No man is truly free, but he that has his

will enlarged to the extent of God's own will, by loving whatsoever God loves, and nothing else. Such a one does not fondly hug this and that particular created good thing, and envasfall himself unto it; but he loves everything that is lovely, beginning at God, and descending down to all his creatures, according to the several degrees of perfection in them. He enjoys a boundless liberty, and a boundless sweetness, according to his boundless love. He enclaspeth the whole world within his outstretched arms; his soul is as wide as the whole universe, as large as "yesterday, today, and for ever." Whosoever is once acquainted with this disposition of spirit, he never desires anything else, and he loves the life of God in himself dearer than his own life. To conclude this, therefore: if we love Christ, and "keep his commandments, his commandments will not be grievous to us; his yoke will be easy, and his burden light;" it will not put us into a state of bondage, but of perfect liberty. For that is most true of evangelical obedience which the wise man speaks of wisdom: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace: she

is a tree of life to those that lay hold upon her; and happy are all they that retain her."

I will now shut up all with one or two considerations, to persuade you further to the keeping of Christ's commandments.

First, from the desire which we all have of knowledge. If we would indeed know divine truths, the only way to come to this is, by keeping Christ's commandments. The grossness of our apprehensions in spiritual things, and the many mistakes which we make about them, proceed from those dull and foggy steams which rise up from our foul hearts, and becloud our understandings. If we but heartily complied with Christ's commandments, and purged our hearts from all gross and sensual affections, we should not then look about for truth wholly without ourselves, and enslave ourselves to the dictates of this and that teacher, and hang upon the lips of men; but we should find the great eternal God inwardly teaching our souls, and continually instructing us more and more in the mysteries of his will; and from within us "should flow rivers of living water." Nothing puts a stop and hindrance to the passage of truth

in the world but the carnality of our hearts, the corruption of our lives.

It is not wrangling disputes and syllogistical reasonings that are the mighty pillars which underprop truth in the world: if we would but underfet it with the holiness of our hearts and lives, it should never fail. Truth is a prevailing, a conquering thing, and would quickly overcome the world, did not the earthiness of our dispositions, and the darkness of our false hearts, hinder it. Our Saviour Christ bids the blind man wash off the clay that was upon his eyes in the Pool of Siloam, and then he should see clearly; intimating this to us, that it is the earthiness of men's affections which darkens the eye of their understandings in spiritual things. Truth is always ready and near at hand, if our eyes were not closed up with mud, if we could but open them to look upon it. Truth always waits upon our souls, and offers itself freely to us, as the sun offers its beams to every eye that will but open and let them shine in upon it. If we could but purge our hearts from that filth and defilement which hangs about them, there would be no doubt at all of truth's prevailing in the world. "For truth is great, and stronger

than all things: all the earth calleth upon truth, and the heaven bleffeth it; all works tremble at it. The truth endureth and is always ftrong; it liveth and conquereth for evermore. She is the ftrength, kingdom, power, and majesty, of all ages. Blessed be the God of truth."

Secondly, if we defire a true reformation, as fome would be thought to do, let us begin by reforming our hearts and lives, by keeping Christ's commandments. All outward forms and models of reformation, though they be never fo good in their kind, yet they are of little worth to us without this inward reformation of the heart. Tin, or lead, or any baser metal, if it be caft into never fo good a mould, and made up into never fo elegant a figure, yet it is but tin or lead ftill, it is the fame metal that it was before. If adulterate silver, with much alloy or dross, have never fo current a stamp, yet it will not pafs when the touchstone tries it. We must be reformed within, with a spirit of fire, and a spirit of burning, to purge us from the dross and corruption of our hearts, and to refine us as gold and silver; and then we shall be reformed truly, and not before. When this once comes to

pass, then shall Christ be set upon his throne indeed; then "the glory of the Lord shall overflow the land;" then we shall be a people acceptable unto him, and as Mount Sion, which he dearly loved.



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